

# The Mind's Eye

Volume 3

Number 1

October 1978

NORTH ADAMS STATE COLLEGE

The Mind's Eye is a journal of review and comment  
published six times during the college year  
at North Adams, Massachusetts 01247

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Union on free speech, the United Nations,  
democracy, and human rights

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### "Waitings Which Ripen Hopes Are Not Delays"

Toward the end of his lightsome book Here at the New Yorker, a work of coruscating wit about the writers, artists, and editors who have labored on that distinguished journal, Brendan Gill remarks that "lack of productivity is neither rebuked nor deplored. On the contrary, it may be sneakily admired as proof that the magazine considers writing an occupation often difficult and sometimes, for the best writers, impossible." So also this little review, The Mind's Eye, which seeks to pluck good writing from a tiny community of scholars, teachers, and students. It trades on generous instincts and waits for the well-crafted article, story, poem, review, comment, reflection, letter. Robert Frost is reputed to have said, "The bravest man in the world is he who enters his study, closes the door, and sits down at his desk facing a blank piece of paper." Students of the old egotist may take that from whence it comes. Another professional writer observed recently that many writers, himself included, bang on a typewriter to find out if they have anything to say. Try that on.



The Editor's File

A CANTERBURY TALE

by Michael Haines

Ever since the eleven hours of "Roots" on TV after the publication of Haley's book, there has been a boom in genealogy. Unlike many, I haven't experienced the urge to delve into my family background (I suspect my forebears are spectacularly uninteresting), but because of a long and intense involvement with English literature, I have felt a growing need to go to the soil where our cultural flowers took root. This summer I indulged that desire.

For me, however, this trip was more than just seeing in real life the scenes I had so often read. For me, a devout Chaucerian, it was--as for those fascinating characters in The Canterbury Tales--a pilgrimage.

Like Chaucer's fourteenth-century pilgrims, I began my journey in London. His pilgrims left the Tabard Inn in Southwark and traveled a couple of days by horseback to Canterbury; I left my hotel on Gower Street (named for Chaucer's contemporary) and reached Canterbury in a Mini 1000 on a four-lane highway in a couple of hours.

Canterbury is much changed from what it was in Chaucer's day, but remnants of the medieval city survive. I drove past a section of the once-encircling wall and through the lone remaining gate--the stone arch of West Gate. Through narrow streets, some barely wide enough for a single car, past an occasional medieval or Renaissance house or shop (one that has subsided so much that its front door tilts a good twenty degrees off the vertical)--till at last I approached the ornate stone gate to the grounds of Canterbury Cathedral.

And there it was before me: though I had talked about it in classes for years, I was not at all prepared for the beauty, the magnificence, the size of the cathedral. Like many a pilgrim before me, I went through the cloister on the north

side to the same door Thomas a Becket entered in 1170, when he was pursued by the knights of Henry II. Just inside is the spot where the knights martyred their archbishop.

Past a painted commemoration of the assassination, down the stairs, I entered the crypt where Becket's remains were originally enshrined. Then upstairs, in the area behind the altar, I came to the place where the more elaborate tomb stood from 1220 until the knights of a later Henry sacked it in the sixteenth century. Still standing in its place of honor near the site of Thomas's shrine is the tomb of Edward, the Black Prince, the flower of fourteenth-century knighthood.

Around the altar, down the long fourteenth-century nave, out through the west porch--and back into the twentieth century. But I returned--at night, when the crowds had gone and the cathedral was illuminated so that all the encroaching buildings faded into the dark. I stood dwarfed by this giant monument to God which inevitably directs one's attention upwards. I stood there a long time.

After a variety of other stops, I finished my pilgrimage when I returned to London and went to Westminster Abbey. Skipping the more popular tombs of Elizabeth I and Henry VII, I went to Poets' Corner. The crowds cleared out, as if they knew I was coming, and there it was--Chaucer's tomb. I approached and read the date, October 25, 1400. I laid my hand on the tomb.

Now, at last, I understand the meaning of pilgrimage: it is not just an act of veneration; it is a revivification, a renewal of the soul, a rededication to the values one holds dear; above all, it prepares one to face the coming year with a feeling of the spring in the soul with which Chaucer begins the Tales, "Whan that April with his shoures soote . . ."



CONVERSATIONS WITH ROGER NASH BALDWIN

by W. Anthony Gengareilly

In May and December of 1977 I interviewed Roger Nash Baldwin, founder of the American Civil Liberties Union, at his New York City residence. Baldwin's career has ranged over a period of sixty-odd years and has embraced a number of causes in addition to civil rights. Since his retirement as Director of the ACLU in 1948, Baldwin has devoted much of his time to the International League for the Rights of Man, a United Nations affiliate. Now in his mid-nineties, he has a sparkling wit and almost total recall of a lifetime of intense activity.

The experience of meeting and knowing Roger Baldwin, however briefly, is one I shall never forget. During our six hours of conversation I not only acquired a good deal of invaluable information about libertarian activities in the 1920s, but I also perceived in Baldwin's life and language an inherent multidimensional quality about human rights. For Baldwin, human liberty has a deep philosophical dimension and strikes a common note in every part of the globe. In these pages I have recounted those parts of our conversations which touch on the general character of libertarianism and which consider human rights in relation to certain political and economic systems, most notably those of the United States, India, and the Soviet Union.

In our first meeting I was searching for the motivational factors underpinning libertarian endeavors. Baldwin mentioned the need for "sympathy with other people's plight," the kind of tolerance which respects someone else's viewpoint. He then made a brief declaration which was, for him, the substance of the issue:

People act when they understand it isn't right to shut people up if they want to talk; it isn't right to stop people from organizing if they want to organize; it isn't right to deny you the right to read anything you want to read or see anything you want to see. And that brings us to the point, the important point, that rights--any way you look at them--are what they call "natural rights," the natural rights of man that don't depend on any constitution or any laws or any courts. They're what we are as human beings who want to talk and associate with our fellows, and that feeling about natural rights is so instinctive in people that where you have repression, they tend to rebel against it.

Q. How, then, are these "natural rights" expressed within a legal-political framework? When might individual conscience, for instance, assert itself over against an unjust law?

A. Civil disobedience is often a very important social force. You have to disobey bad laws, and I think you have to be prepared to take the consequences, too.

Q. What about self-imposed exile to evade a bad law?

A. I don't believe in evading things. I wouldn't have gone to Canada during the Vietnam War. I don't think evasions help any cause.

Q. If you had lived in Nazi Germany, would you have fled from Hitler's persecution of



dissenters?

A. If I had lived in Germany at that time, I'd have done the best I could to get out of it.

Q. Then perhaps you have to respect the system of justice before you are willing to accept the penalty for violating laws which oppose your conscience?

A. Yes, you have to have some respect for it, sure.

Q. As a committed pacifist you went to jail in 1918, during World War I, for defying the Selective Service Act. Would you have fought in World War II against Hitler?

A. No. I took a very unreasonable, absolutist position that I would not personally take part in any form of violence; that I wouldn't be a policeman; that I wouldn't be a member of an armed posse; that I wouldn't join the army; that I wouldn't be a participant in violence. I felt so strongly about coercion in principle that I wouldn't coerce anybody. It would trouble me to cause anybody to be arrested . . . might do it under certain circumstances. I would if I saw somebody being attacked, and I had a weapon to prevent it. I'd use it. But those are different circumstances than organized violence. I've thought that many wars were justified; that there was no other way out; and that I knew which side I wanted to have win, but I wouldn't necessarily have taken part.

Q. I assume, that for similar reasons, you also oppose capital punishment?

A. I have always been opposed to capital punishment. It's a very hard doctrine, because some cases stretch one's tolerance. And one feels as Clarence Darrow felt--"Well, I never wanted to kill anybody, but," he said, "I read a good many obituary notices with satisfaction."

Q. Does libertarianism have any specific goal in our society other than realizing the rights of individuals?

A. The major objective is to see that relationships between people . . . are fairly determined. People should have an equal chance to at least express themselves, to influence policy. That's what democracy is, a process of decision by majority with minority rights, and that's the best way you can make the system. We don't have a better way of doing it than that. But we have to be sure that the minorities are protected. That's always a difficult and ongoing task, because there's always a tendency to suppress minorities. The majority is not tolerant.

Q. The ACLU as an elitist group, has been a powerful spokesman for the underdog. Is there anything inconsistent here with respect to socially prominent, intellectual, and professional elitists espousing general, democratic ideals?

A. The ACLU is elitist. Yes, of course; why not? If you would look at the American democracy, what is it except a bunch of elitist groups? The so-called "voice of the people" happens at election times, and I suppose public opinion polls represent the voice of the people, but action is in the hands of strong minorities. This is a country with a network of very powerful citizen organizations that serve their own interests. In the proper sense of the word "elite," I think they are all elitist organizations.

Q. Your elitist status and capacity gave the ACLU a certain measure of influence, didn't it?

A. Oh yes, from the very beginning we had influence.

Q. Even though the ACLU has often dissented from the majority position in defense of minority rights, the organization has never really challenged the republican-capitalist system. Why?

A. We are living within a capitalist society, and we think we can make peace with it, get along with it. We are not going to take on the reform of a capitalist society. We just say that you



## TO A MINISTER

Mr. Peck  
 was a white-haired, red-faced man of God  
 with a wit from deep in the earth.  
 The kind of man people cannot do  
 without.  
 He had sense and sensibility, patience  
 and impatience, durability  
 and fragility and sweetness and pain.  
 And the will withal  
 to meet you eye to eye.

If there is a place where  
 men and women  
 live on  
 he is treasured there.

But if this earth is all. . . .  
 Well, how can it be?  
 To waste a Mr. Peck.

by Charles McIsaac

can have change through the process of civil rights of people. Under a capitalist system, or any other system, you have to have the right to change things. You've got to be able to talk and meet and agitate and do all the things you do to make change effective.

Q. But, doesn't the fact that libertarians are so committed to the functioning system limit what they can do in order to improve things?

A. Of course it does. They are not committed to changing anything. They are only committed to seeing that the game is fairly played. Officially, we are not asking to change the system, only asking that the system should work fairly.

Q. Sometimes isn't it necessary to change the system to make it work fairly?

A. We did it with the National Labor Relations Act. It put government on the side of the trade unions. It changed the whole system. It put government influence

where it ought to be, where it never had been. But it did not fundamentally alter the basis of the system. The basis of it is private property.

Q. You want private property regulated, however?

A. Yes.

Q. But libertarians--yourself--fall into line with the American political tradition, which encompasses devotion to capitalism and representative government?

A. Yes, of course . . . A change in society from a basis in private property to socialism, to community owned property, would be a very revolutionary step, and I can't conceive of the ACLU taking part in it.

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 In the course of the December interview our talk spilled over into Baldwin's international



concerns. I asked him about the International League for the Rights of Man, which he helped to establish in 1946.

Q. Just what is the league involved with?

A. It is a small international body recognized by the U.N. We do what we can to bring some influence to bear on what the United Nations is trying to do to extend the law of human rights. The United Nations' efforts in the direction of human rights are far more extensive than most people realize because, although in law we have not been able to break down the resistance of countries to any kind of international inspection of what they are doing to their own citizens, nevertheless there are many United Nations agencies which are called upon to act on human rights everywhere.

Q. Overall, do you see much future for the United Nations?

A. Oh, sure. It has more of a future than it has a past [laughs] . . . indicated by the fact that everybody wants to be there; nobody wants to get out. You couldn't get anybody to resign. They all have the understanding that there must be a universal organization if you are going to have peace.

Q. What about President Carter's emphasis on human rights in his foreign policy?

A. Well, that's of course very helpful to have him emphasize torture, imprisonment, locking people up for their views. He has done a very great service. But countries resist so much any outside interference that they don't reform when you tell them to.

Q. Could Carter's policy backfire and serve as an obstacle for the oppressed inside other countries? For instance, the Russian dissidents. Has Carter's preaching to the Soviet leadership hurt their cause?

A. Some people say that it does. I wouldn't think so. I don't think countries dare go to the extremes they did

before, because they're respectful of foreign criticism.

Q. What about the vote for freedom in India in March 1977? Was the major issue in that election the question of freedom versus authoritarianism, as many people have maintained?

A. I think there is no doubt that locking up 50,000 people--all the opposition--in a federated state like India was a profound shock all the way through the country. Mrs. Gandhi was practically forced into the election because there was so much opposition in the army and the police. The opposition could make a great case out of the democracy that India was so proud of. Although the strains and stresses in that society are very great, they hold together, and I think that's the only way they know how to hold together.

Q. You mean to say that the democratic ideal, which was attached to the nation's emergence in the late forties, is an important cohesive factor for the Indian people?

A. Yes, ideally.

Q. Here is another question that perhaps comes out of this. If given a free choice, would people always choose democracy?

A. I don't know of any country that exists that voted itself into an autocracy.

Q. But, aren't there many places in the world where rights and freedoms are considered luxuries of secondary importance?

A. Oh, yes.

Q. So, for these people, in Cuba let's say, rights and freedoms as we know and understand them aren't as crucial as the proper regulation of their economic affairs?

A. Well, that's true. There's a lot of them that feel that way, I'm sure. Certainly they would think about eating before they would think about freedom.



Q. Aren't human freedoms, then, the privilege of those who have attained a certain degree of economic abundance?

A. You know, this "give me liberty or give me death" business is quite rare. People want to eat so much that liberty is only important if it's a dominant issue. Ordinarily--in answer to your question--ordinarily, people will sacrifice their liberties for their well-being. Welfare is more important.

Q. Yet, ideals can take a primary position?

A. They can under certain circumstances. I think it depends on the particular instance. I think it depends how strongly you feel and what the provocations are. You take the long struggle in the history of Ireland for freedom from Great Britain. The Irish were ready to starve for their freedom. They gave up everything.

Q. Are the individual freedoms in our own country also of secondary importance and not too deeply valued by most people?

A. Talk to the average American--Harris Poll, Gallup Poll would show you--a large part of the people are perfectly content with the kind of freedom and democracy we've got. They might distrust the government. They might think that corruption is rampant, but after all this is a prosperous country, and people have their private lives and their businesses and their properties. They're getting along pretty well. Why should they worry? They don't worry about their liberties and their freedoms.

Q. People have often said that because of our affluence we have been able to afford our human freedoms.

A. There's a great deal in that.

Q. There obviously is. But weren't there times when things haven't gone well for the country, when it looked like emergency powers were necessary, and yet people were still conscious of their democratic options, in maintaining these?

A. It's been amazing. We did it during our most desperate days. Lincoln was elected for the second time during the Civil War. It never happened anywhere else that I ever heard of.

Q. We evidently have a deep-seated commitment to democratic freedoms. It's not on the surface, but it's there. Would we ever be willing to permanently relinquish our freedoms?

A. I'm a great admirer of our historical record of democracy. I think its extraordinary in a country as varied as this country is and always has been that it should have pulled itself together with a consensus of how to get along, of how to run things. It's worked. It's been remarkable. I remember Emerson's remark about our living in a democracy. He said, "Living in a democracy is like living on a raft. It never sinks, but your feet are always wet." [laughs] Always that uneasy feeling that maybe it'll sink.

## The Periodical Press

### THE AUTUMN GAME

#### Part One

Violence in football--professional, college, and high school--is exhaustively examined by John Underwood in a three-part series "Brutality: The Crisis in Football" (Sports Illustrated, August 14, 21, 28). Underwood predicts that the level of mayhem now tolerated will lead to the demise of the game. I was saddened by what I read because I have loved professional football all my life. In the mid-1930s I used to cash in milk bottles to get enough money for a seat behind the goal posts at the Boston Redskins' games. The scenes I saw there are etched in my memory, the more indelibly for the bitter disappointment of too often seeing my heroes lose--like the day they held off Dutch Clark's swift Detroit Lions until, late in the game, Ernie Caddel scored the winning touchdown skittering through a wide hole, his jersey ripped off his back but his body erect as a statue.



Another Sunday, Harry Newman, the New York Giant quarterback, hovered behind a bouncing Cliff Battles punt near his own 10-yard line as two Redskins (only two: modern-day "pursuit" hadn't been invented) waited warily for the ball to stop rolling. Not warily enough, as it turned out, for Newman suddenly darted between them, picked up the ball, and ran it most of the way upfield while the hapless defenders, missing the tackle by a whisker, smashed head-on into temporary oblivion. For a few moments they lay as if dead. Ken Strong, the Giants' all-pro back, finished the 'Skins off that afternoon with a disgusting display of fine running and kicking--marking the date when I became a lifelong Giant hater, save for the years when they were victimized in subfreezing weather by Vince Lombardi's Green Bay Packers, whom I hated even more.

The Chicago Bears of Bronko Nagurski, Beattie Feathers, and Bill Hewitt were the most awesome team in football. Right end Hewitt, wearing no helmet, destroyed every Redskin attempt to get by him; his skill at eluding blockers and stepping across the line of scrimmage was uncanny.

Feathers, of the University of Tennessee and reportedly part American Indian, ran all over the place behind the stunning blocking of George Musso. And I can still see the incomparable Nagurski crossing the goal line from ten yards out carrying three men on his back. The Bears were so good that I couldn't bear them a grudge. They simply wiped the Redskins out.

In 1936 Boston won the Eastern Division title. Cliff Battles, a Greek god of an athlete from West Virginia Wesleyan, ran, passed, and kicked better than Ken Strong. His broken-field running was beautiful to behold; and I swear I once saw him punt a ball 80 yards in the air. Behemoth left tackle Turk Edwards played both ways (they all did) with crushing efficiency. I especially admired the prowess of the two ends, Charlie Malone and Flavio Tosi, because I, too, was an end--for the Fallon Field Hot Dogs, a sandlot team that had no business playing in its ill-equipped, haphazardly coached condition. But I was so steamed up by the Redskin games that every Sunday I ran, broken-field,

over the mile of sidewalks from Fenway Park to the Huntington Avenue streetcar.

At the end of the 1936 season--after he lost the championship playoff to the Packers--owner George Marshall moved his franchise to Washington where it has remained ever since. There, led by the inestimable Sammy Baugh, the Redskins went on to a decade of glory (spectacularly marred by a 73-0 championship defeat in 1940 by Sid Luckman's Chicago Bears, who that day unveiled the man-in-motion T-formation which revolutionized football).

The short-lived Boston Yanks succeeded the Redskins. I saw them in 1945 against the Green Bay Packers when the great end Don Hutson was at the close of his unexcelled career. Hutson, minus shoulder pads, toyed with Boston. On one scoring play he went straight down from the Yanks' 30-yard line, closely pursued, made a 90-degree turn by grabbing the goal post, and gathered in a perfectly thrown pass.

That was the last pro contest I saw from the stands, and I kept but desultory track of the game for a few years. Then came TV and the Sunday afternoon mania which soon took on the aura of a religion. Lacking a local club to root for, my loyalties have been consecrated successively to Cleveland, Baltimore, and for many years now the Dallas Cowboys of cool-hatted Tom Landry, whom I have charitably forgiven for having been a New York Giant. Starry-eyed, I overlooked the growing desecration to be described in Part Two of this article.

--Charles McIsaac

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### Contributors

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Michael Haines, Assistant Professor of English, is a specialist in medieval literature and a freelance journalist.

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